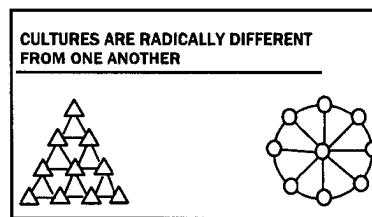


V. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND THE MESSENGER

In missions we encounter daily the reality of cultural differences. People do not live in the same worlds with different labels attached—they live in different worlds. The differences are far deeper than simply food, dress, language and beliefs. They occur at the deepest levels of the cultural and social systems. What implications do these have for us in missions? We look first at the impact of cultural differences on the messenger.



1. CULTURE SHOCK

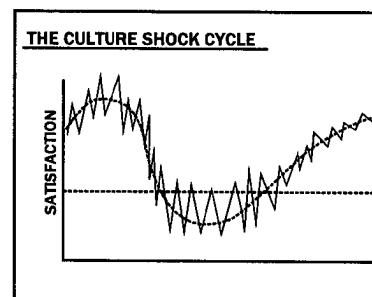
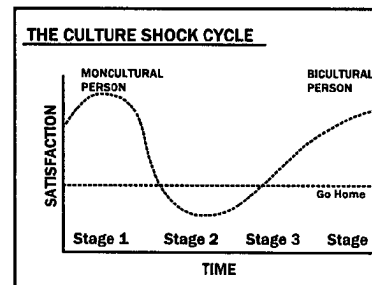
1.1 Adjusting to a new culture:

1.2 Stages:

- tourist
- disenchantment
- resolution
- adjustment

1.3 Symptoms:

- rising stress
- physical illness
- psychological and spiritual depression



1.4 Dealing with culture shock:

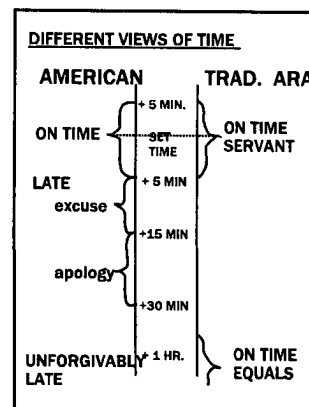
- **recognize our anxieties:** we need to be honest with ourselves, and transparent to others.
- **study the new culture:** enter as a student, bond with the people and their culture.
- **build trust:** share ourselves with the people, and learn to appreciate and show that appreciation for their culture.
- **deal with stress:** set realistic goals, don't take ourselves too seriously, treat ourselves.

1.5 Reverse culture shock:

- things are no longer the same when you return 'home'—you have changed
- sense of loss of 'home' and of relatives and friends
- be understanding of your home church—treat it like a 'native community.'

2. MISUNDERSTANDINGS

On the cognitive level we often misunderstand other cultures. Remember, a culture makes sense to its people. If it seems nonsense to us, we do not really understand it. We must



understand it in two ways.

2.1 *Emic view of reality*: this is the way people view their own and other cultures—from the worldview of their own culture. This includes the way we as outsiders look at a culture, and the way the people themselves look at a culture [their own and ours]. Remember, people act from their own emic perspective, whether they are right or not. It is their phenomenological reality, just as our culturally based view is our phenomenological reality. We take our views to be True ontologically.

It is important for us to understand the people's view of reality to relate to them. We must begin with their views when we communicate and introduce change

It is important to examine our own view of reality to see how it has been shaped by our culture and not reality itself.

2.2 *Etic view of reality* : this is a view of cultures based on a comparative analysis of cultures. It is ameta-cultural perspective that serves as the bases for becoming a bicultural person. It is essential to enable us to communicate interculturally, and to compare and judge different *emic* views of reality.

3. ETHNOCENTRISM

On the affective level, we often dislike other cultures, and judge them by the likes and dislikes of our own culture. These deep emotions reinforce our cognitive judgments of other cultures. To overcome this, we must remember that people love their cultures, and we must develop a deep empathetic appreciation of other cultures that transcends our own automatic ethnocentric responses.

3.1 Ethnocentrism is seen in the way we view OTHERS and OTHERNESS.

3.2 Ethnocentrism expresses itself in many ways:

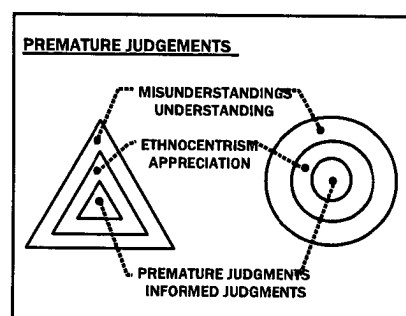
- Individuals identify with groups. People are either in-group or out-group.
- Groups have their own signs of identity, and ways of identifying 'strangers.'
- Groups generally have little knowledge of or interest in knowing about outsiders and their ways.
- People treat in-group members as individuals, but stereotype outsiders. The result is prejudice.
- People discriminate against outsiders by taking actions on the basis of ethnocentrism.

| HOW DO WE VIEW OTHERS? | | | |
|--|----|-------------|--|
| OTHERS | | US | |
| <u>MIDDLE AGES:</u> | | | |
| • Monsters | vs | Humans | |
| • Infidels, Heretics | vs | Christian | |
| <u>AGE OF EXPLORATION:</u> | | | |
| • Pagan, Heathen | vs | Christian | |
| • Slave, Child | vs | Free, Adult | |
| • Savage, Barbarian | vs | Civilized | |
| <u>AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT:</u> | | | |
| • Primitive | vs | Civilized | |
| • Aborigine | vs | Modern | |
| <u>AGE OF POST-ENLIGHTENMENT:</u> | | | |
| • Native | vs | Native | |
| <u>OUR CHRISTIAN VIEW:</u> | | | |
| • There is only US - | | | |
| - one in our common humanity | | | |
| - one in the body of Christ | | | |

- People show empathy to insiders, but mistrust outsiders. They give the benefit of a doubt to in-group members, but assume the worst of out-group members. They are highly sensitive to and suspicious of outsiders.
- People seek peace in the group, but often seek conflict with out-groups.
- The out-groups' saints are the in-group's devils. People judge others by the group's standards. They scapegoat—blame the out-group for their problems.
- Ethnocentrism intensifies during times of crisis
- Ghettoization: Out-groups, particularly racial out-groups, are often confined to particular locations and/or occupations.
- Essentialization: in-group members generally believe that they have an essential commonality that is different from outsiders.

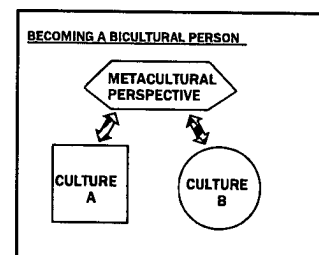
4. PREMATURE JUDGMENTS

On the evaluative level we often judge other cultures before we understand and appreciate them. We need to be cautious in our judgments, and keep them open to review. We should avoid judging other cultures by the values of our own. Rather we need to judge all cultures, including our own, by 1) a bicultural perspective that compares and evaluates all cultures, and, above all, by 2) Scripture which reveal to us how God judges all cultures.



5. BECOMING A BICULTURAL PERSON

In inter-cultural ministries it is essential that we become bicultural persons who identify deeply with two or more cultures, but who also stand outside all of them and observe them from a bicultural perspective.



- 5.1 *Insiders*: We must seek to inculturate ourselves in the culture of the people we serve, just as Jesus identified himself fully with us in our humanity. He was one hundred percent human. We only know what God intended for us to be without sin by looking at Jesus.
- 5.2 *Outsiders*: We must also remain in part outsiders, for we are bearers of God's message to people. We cannot [and should not] 'go totally native,' for that would deny who we are, and what we can bring to the people.
- 5.3 *Insider-outsider*: We live in the tension of being insiders-outsiders. We are cultural brokers—bridges between two cultural worlds. As such we are often mistrusted by both sides because they do not know what we are doing when we are away, and we seem to

have changed when we come back to them. But culture brokers are essential in mission and in the formation of the global church.